



Oct. 11, 2026
Proper 23A – Stewardship Sunday
The Very Rev. Jonathan Thomas

Matthew 22:1-14

Once more Jesus spoke to the people in parables, saying: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. Again he sent other slaves, saying, ‘Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.’ But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.’ Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?’ And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ For many are called, but few are chosen.”

Setting a Place at the Table

In seminary, I was the research assistant for a professor names Geddes Hanson, who went by Guy, and taught in the practical theology department on things like conflict style and resolution and how to run an outward-facing church. Guy was the first black man to graduate from Harvard Divinity School, and the first tenured black professor at Princeton Seminary. He had a tendency to choose aspiring pastors who came from hard backgrounds as his assistants, often students of colour because he understood the challenges they faced at Ivy League institutions, and helped them through with things like buying their books or their first suit for an interview, as they aided him in his research projects. He and his wife never had any children so they were collectors of chosen family, and he chose me as his last assistant for the final two years before he retired, likely because he thought I was struggling a bit in life, and he was right, as he usually was about people.



We became very close and he invited me and my wife at the time over for Thanksgiving dinner my senior year when we couldn't get home to see family. I knew his table would be full of a who's who of academics and was honoured to be a part of it. We were all set when this first year student who I had befriended asked what we were doing for Thanksgiving because he was all alone. I didn't want to leave him out, but also didn't feel like I could invite him to someone else's house for a holiday meal on short notice. So I called up Guy and told him I was sorry but we wouldn't be able to make it. He asked if one of us was sick, and I said no, and explained the situation. The only time I ever remember him being upset with me was when he said, "JT (that's what he called me), are you trying to be a priest in God's one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church, and you don't know that there's always plenty good room at Christ's table, wherever it's set?" (Quoting the language of the old African-American spiritual). He went on, "I will set an extra place and see all three of you tomorrow at 2 o'clock because you need to learn something." We showed up the next day, and there were luminaries of academia, pillars of the church, local townies, and misfit students, all sharing conversation and a meal, and it was as close to the heavenly banquet I've ever come without a Eucharistic altar, and we had communion right there, with Christ amongst us.

This morning we read the third parable Jesus tells in response to the question from the Pharisees asking by whose authority he is doing and teaching the things he is known for – healing the lepers, dining with tax collectors and prostitutes, teaching and converting the gentiles. He can only explain the authority by explaining the heart of the one who sent him. There is a father who is throwing a wedding feast for his son, and he invites everyone he knows, and when the days come and they don't show up, he sends a reminder, and when it is clear they are not coming he makes known that all he wants is people to celebrate with him, to share in his feast that he is providing - to be grateful, to be glad, to find their place at the table and be filled. So he sends the servants back out to collect anyone on the street who will come in and join the feast. Jesus is telling them, it can be farmers, or merchants, temple officials, dignitaries of the court, or people pulled in right off the street. That doesn't matter, God just wants the seats to be full because God despises an empty table. The places are set and there is plenty good room for everyone, don't you know. That vision of God gives Jesus all the authority he needs to do the work he is doing.

Today is the start of our stewardship season, and our theme this year is Setting a Place at the Table. You see, our problem is not that there are too few dollars in our bank account, it is that there are too many empty seats around the God's table in Christ's Church, not enough conversations around us influenced by the priorities of God, too many people needing to be embraced and not knowing where to go to find that community. In chapter eleven of the book of the prophet Amos, it says, "the days are surely coming declares the Lord, when there will be a famine throughout the land, not a hunger for food or a thirst for water, but a famine for hearing the word of the Lord." Those days have come. And there is also a hunger for food and a thirst for limited water, but those problems will not be solved unless the conversations about solutions are influenced by the priorities of God and we need people to fill these spaces to learn about those. And there is a deep yearning for real community, amidst



a rise in violence at one end of the engagement spectrum and an epidemic of loneliness at the other, and that yearning will not be sated if not for gatherings around tables like this one, where people can be loved across difference, embraced in spite of flaws and failings, and know that there is a place set especially for them. There is a real desire to hear the voice of God again amidst the technological onslaught filling our spaces and cacophonous noise of modern society, and it is in places like this one where God's voice can be heard in the beauty of music or known in the majestic silence of a stilled room and a lit candle. And there is a dearth of hope and faith and meaning, and it will not be filled if we do not go out into the street and public spaces and tell people the good news we have heard, and felt, and experienced ourselves, and invite them in to know it as well and find their purpose. We need to intentionally set places at the table and invite people in.

I am not opposed to asking you for money. We have done good work with what we have been given – making strides to close a structural budget deficit, funding new ministries, and prioritizing the hiring of a communications director who will help us proclaim our message, be in those conversations, and reach new people. But stewardship is about far more than pledging money. It is also about committing your whole person to the work God has given you, and using your resources, your skills and passions, and the moments of your life to serve Christ's mission wherever you are called. And my job is not primarily fundraising or balancing a budget; it is to teach you to be faithful – to give back part of what God has given you in an act of gratitude, to being lifelong learners of the faith, to being joyous proclaimers of good news in the world and doers of good works and signs of God's love. If all of that results in more people around this table and more dollars in the budget, we will use it for more ministry and more personnel to lead our outreach initiatives to serve more people, or to organize our educational efforts to help more people learn about the love of God, or to increase our connection to the school to train a new generation to be disciples of Jesus in the Anglican tradition. There is no mystery to it. Those are the goals. They will be the same next year because it's our mission – the great commission, to heal, and to preach good news and to make disciples of the way of Jesus. But it all starts with setting places at the eucharistic table of God, and bringing people in where they too can know and be changed.

I do want to return to today's gospel, particularly that harsh part at the end. I skipped it, just like I left out discussion of the condemnation at the end of last week's passage about the vineyard tenants too. But it is worth a word. God invites us to participate in God's work. Some of us are tenants keeping the vineyard and we are expected to run it the way God designed and return to God what is due. Some of us are those who prepare the banquet tables or are sent out to invite others in, and we are expected to do it diligently and faithfully until the appropriate people respond. Some of us are guests at the banquet, and we are expected to show up knowing that this is a celebratory feast. It is not about what you wear, but about realizing that you are privileged to be part of this wedding banquet. I think I made clear last week that I don't think these passages are about hell or some punishment. But I do think there is something about responding appropriately to the offer and expectations of God. I believe God invites us to be part of God's work in the world, and part of God's feast,



and whatever our role is we are to do it with intention, and in line with God's will, and full of faith, or God finds someone else to do the work because it is a gift to have purpose and participate. So let us be good stewards. Let us tend God's house the way God intended, let us give back to God with glad hearts, let us faithfully carry out the work of setting the table and inviting others in, and let us show up to the feast knowing that we are here to celebrate and be glad. May we commit to doing this work together this year. May we know that there is plenty good room at Christ's table and prepare places to welcome the array of people who come in, and may we joyfully celebrate the feast of God every time we join together in this building and out in the world. Amen.